

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

February 10, 2003

The Honorable C. W. Bill Young
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
H-218 The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable David Obey
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
H-218 The Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Bill
Dear Chairman ~~Young~~ and Ranking Member ~~Obey~~ *David*:

We are very concerned that the ongoing omnibus appropriation negotiations may fail to adequately aid our nation's 2 million first responders. These police, fire, emergency, and public health personnel are on the front lines of our domestic war on terrorism and will make the difference in preventing and responding to future terrorist attacks. In particular, with the possibility of war in Iraq and increased threats of terrorist retaliatory strikes at home, we urge you to help meet our obligations to protect the homeland.

As Secretary Tom Ridge frequently says, the homeland will be secure only when the hometowns are secure. Yet federal support for first responders has been an empty promise for many months. As you and other conferees negotiate, we ask that you not fail to meet the expectations and needs of our states, counties, and cities.

We urge you to provide a minimum of \$7.1 Billion for first responder grants for this year's appropriation, adding the President's FY04 request to the FY03 level agreed upon in the Senate. In addition, we urge you to include language directing a more rapid disbursement of these funds by FEMA and the Office of Domestic Preparedness. As you know, a number of agencies are only now soliciting grant proposals for homeland security funds appropriated in last August's Supplemental Appropriations Act.

On behalf of our first responders, we appreciate your efforts to provide the level of support we request.

Sincerely,


Ike Skelton


Jane Harman